

Creating an Effective Password

A good password isn't difficult to create. All you need to do is keep in mind a few simple rules.

1. Don't choose something of personal significance. In other words, don't use:
 - Your name or the name of someone close to you or a pet's name.
 - Your address.
 - Your Social Security Number.
 - Your favorite hobby or pastime.
 - Your current or favorite vehicle name.
 - Any other information that is associated with you, your activities, or your preferences.
2. Don't choose something trivial. For instance, don't use 12345 or AAAAA as your password.
3. Don't use the word "password" as your password. This only puts you and APHIS in jeopardy.
4. Don't use a common dictionary word, regardless of the language. Password cracking programs compare passwords to dictionary words in an attempt to find a match.

OK, so those are the things you shouldn't do. So what can you do to create a good password?

1. Create a unique password by combining two or more words into something that you will easily remember. For example, Go4aGetter or Protection2Me or Run4Love .
2. Another technique is to make up a phrase that you will readily remember and then use the first letter from each word in the phrase to develop your password. For example: the phrase My security officer is 1 peachy guy results in the password Msoi1pg.
3. Good passwords are at least six (6) characters long and use a mix of letters (both upper and lower case), numbers, and special characters. Just avoid having a number at the beginning or end, to make password cracking more difficult.
4. Use different passwords for your network access e-mail, screen saver, and so forth.
5. Change your password often. This helps protect you in case someone accidentally learns your password.

Now that you've chosen a good password, make certain to protect it. If someone else uses your user identification and password, the system will think that person is you. Whatever they do on the system will now be considered your doing -- and maybe your fault. So, don't post your passwords on your terminal screen or elsewhere in your work area. If you absolutely must write them down (unlikely, if you use the techniques above), keep your password(s) in your purse or wallet.